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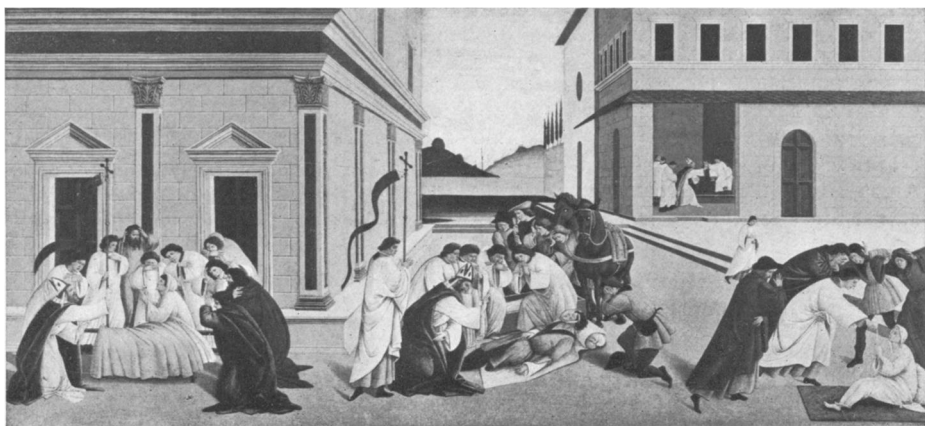
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THREE MIRACLES OF SAINT ZENOBIUS
BY BOTTICELLI

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THIS important work was bought by the Museum at the Sale of the Abdy Collection, which took place in London on May 5, 1911. Owing to the fact that the Abdy pictures had been in storage for the greater part of the last twenty years, and had been very rarely seen by outsiders, this painting, until the exhibition preceding the sale, was unknown to the prominent authorities on the work of Botticelli and does not appear in any of the lists of his pictures.

The painting is in tempera on a poplar panel $26\frac{1}{2} \times 59$ inches. It is one of a series of paintings on similar wood and of approximately the same height and slightly varying width, illustrating the life and miracles of Saint Zenobius, of which two are in the Mond Collection in London (recently bequeathed to the National Gallery), and one in the Dresden Gallery.¹ All came from the palace of the Marchesi Rondinelli in Florence, out of which the Mond panels

were bought directly several years ago. The family had disposed of the other two of the series previously, the Dresden picture having been formerly in the Metzger Collection in Florence, then in the Von Quandt Collection in Dresden, at the sale of which collection in 1868 it was purchased for the Dresden Gallery. Our panel was bought by Sir William Neville Abdy from an antiquary in Milan about forty years ago.

The purpose of these panels was probably for the decoration of furniture. Dr. J. P. Richter, in his complete and authoritative catalogue of the Mond Collection, in commenting on the two of the series which form part of that collection, says, "Their size and character make it likely that they were designed to decorate some large piece of furniture destined to contain clerical vestments in the sacristy of some church connected with the cult of Saint Zenobius—very likely in that of the Duomo itself or perhaps in a room in the neighboring archbishop's palace." No delicacy of finish would be demanded in works of this sort, and the execution of these panels is rather hasty and but little effort has been made toward subtleties of color. But they are most admirably designed for the decorative effect for which they were intended. There is a sharp outline to all the figures and objects, and the spaces so outlined are painted

¹The various sizes are as follows: Life of Saint Zenobius, Mond Collection, 26×58 inches; Miracles of Saint Zenobius, Mond Collection, $24\frac{3}{4} \times 54$ inches; Miracles and Death of Saint Zenobius, Dresden Gallery, $26 \times 71\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

flatly, making a mosaic of tones and colors, giving a clear, rich effect, a process not dissimilar to that used in the designing of early windows. Another peculiarity which these paintings have in common with much of the art of the time—a heritage from the Middle Ages—is that they are conceived primarily as narrative, and there is no attempt in

columns, or an altar—in the neighborhood of each group by way of label, to call attention to the fact that here was a change of scene.

Saint Zenobius, whose life and miracles are the subjects of the panels of this series, was one of the patron saints of Florence and was bishop of that city in the fourth



LIFE OF SAINT ZENOBIOUS
BY BOTTICELLI (MOND COLLECTION)



MIRACLES OF SAINT ZENOBIOUS
BY BOTTICELLI. (MOND COLLECTION)

them to expose the incidents realistically in their proper surroundings, as would occur to a modern painter. Furthermore, the Gothic and early Renaissance artist, not satisfied with the portrayal of but one incident, makes the story progress in his picture and shows several of its happenings against a common background, often introducing, as in old dramas and miracle plays, a descriptive object—a curtain, or

century. A story of his life collected from ancient sources was written by Saint Antonino, himself a bishop of Florence in the fifteenth century. It was printed at Nuremberg and at Basle in 1491. Five versions of his legend, four in Italian and one in Latin, *La Vita di San Zanobi scritta da pin antiche grattare diversi autore*, etc., were printed in Florence in 1863. All of the episodes of his life and his miracles are

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given in this book, and one of the versions reprinted in it, that by Tolosani,¹ has served for the deciphering of the stories in our picture.

In the first of the Mond panels (catalogue number XXIX) are events from the life of the saint. Beginning at the left these are his renunciation of marriage, his baptism,

the resuscitation of the son of the French lady, and the restoring of sight to the blind beggar. In the Dresden picture the death of the saint is at the right, and in the rest of the space are three incidents in the story of the bringing back to life of the child run over by an ox cart. The accident is shown at the extreme left, then the bringing of the



THREE MIRACLES OF SAINT ZENOBIOUS
BY BOTTICELLI. (METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART)



MIRACLES AND DEATH OF SAINT ZENOBIOUS
BY BOTTICELLI. (DRESDEN GALLERY)

the baptism of his family, and his consecration as bishop. In the other panel of this collection (number XXX) three of his miracles are shown: the miracle of the curing of the young men possessed by devils,

¹La Vita del glorioso santissimo Zenobio, composta e riformata per F. Gio. Maria Tolosani da Colle di Valdelsa cittadino Fiorentino dell'ordine dei Frati Predicatori. Written in 1487.

dead child to Saint Zenobius, and in the center of the panel, the restoring of the resuscitated child to his mother.

There are three unrelated stories portrayed in our panel, one in three scenes. Their setting is an open space in a city, with palaces to the right and left and an opening between giving a glimpse of landscape and a garden wall. The first of these stories, that at the left, shows the saint in his bish-

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op's vestments, several priests, and five persons in secular dress (who here do duty for a numerous funeral company) gathered about a bier on which, in obedience to the bishop's uplifted hand, a youth wrapped round with a winding sheet raises himself. The story is told in Chapter 14 in Tolosani's life, "Of a second dead person

bring back another to life. If your charity has been so great that you have done this favor to a lady of France, a stranger and unknown, how much more should you be inclined to do it toward those who are natives of your own city. The shepherd is more concerned with his own flock than with those committed to the



A YOUTH RESTORED TO LIFE. THREE MIRACLES OF SAINT ZENOBIOUS (DETAIL).
BY BOTTICELLI

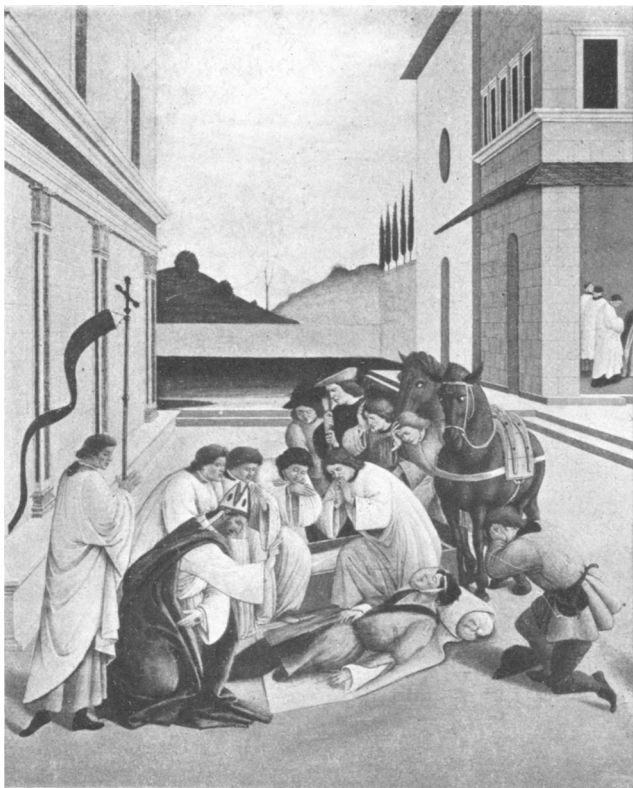
brought back to life by Saint Zenobius." The saint, while on his way to a church outside Florence, was stopped in a narrow street by a funeral procession. Those who carried the body set it down at the bishop's feet and prayed him to bring back to life the dead youth they were carrying. Zenobius tried to draw back from such a task, but his petitioners insisted, saying: "He who has resuscitated one dead person can also

care of others." The saint was at last moved to content them. So he prayed, and the dead came back to life "to the joy and happiness of all those who were there, and presently the fame of this miracle was spread all over the city."

Close to this group, in the center of the picture, the saint is seen before a dead person, and again priests and acolytes are with him. Here the corpse is laid on blankets

on the ground beside a box and round about are men dressed as for a journey and two horses are with them. These indications (with the knowledge of the legend which was general at the time) have seemed sufficient without suggestion of mountain scenery to convey the purport of the story which is told by Tolosani in Chapter 18,

had fallen with his horse down a precipice and had been crushed to death. The saint comforted them, saying, "This does not happen by accident but by Will of Divine Providence to the end that may be manifested the veritableness of these sacred relics." Then Saint Zenobius knelt before the relics, kissing the box in which they were



THE RAISING OF SIMPLICIO. THREE MIRACLES OF SAINT ZENOBIUS (DETAIL).
BY BOTTICELLI

"Of a dead man resuscitated in the heights of the Apennines." On a journey to the country for the purpose of consecrating a church Saint Zenobius fell in with messengers from Saint Ambrosius of Milan, who was sending precious relics of martyrs to Saint Zenobius by them. The messengers were weeping. On asking the cause the saint learned that one of their number, the chief of their party, one named Simplicio,

incased, and bidding all the people to pray with him "so that God might manifest the glory of His martyrs' relics, found by divine revelation to Saint Ambrosius, the Bishop of Milan, who sent them to his dearly beloved brother, the Florentine Zenobius." And when the saint had finished his prayer, Simplicio came back to life, and his body, which had been pitifully mangled, was without a bruise.

The third story told in three scenes at the right is in Chapter 26 of Tolosani's narrative, "The Illness of Saint Eugenius and the Miracle done at that Time." Saint Eugenius, a friend of Saint Ambrosius and Saint Zenobius, and a deacon in the Cathedral of Florence, when gravely ill heard that a near relative had died without receiving the sacraments of the church. The fear that the soul of his relative was in danger preyed upon his mind to such an extent that his recovery was despaired of. On being told this fact, Saint Zenobius blessed water and salt, and taking them to Saint Eugenius bade him rise from his sick bed and dress himself and go to the house where the dead was, not yet being buried, and sprinkle over the body the blessed water and then return to his bed. So Saint Eugenius dressed himself, says the story, and did as he was commanded; over the corpse he sprinkled the holy water and immediately the dead revived.

The first scene of this miracle takes place in the bedroom of Saint Eugenius. To show it, a part of the palace wall on the far side of the piazza is removed. In the room thus seen is Eugenius rising from his bed with Zenobius at the foot of the bed holding out to him the chalice of the blessed water. Acolytes are with him. Saint Eugenius wears his cassock even here, as in pictures of this sort, where the same personage occurs more than once, according to the fixed convention he must always be dressed in the same manner, a necessity for the proper understanding of the story. Saint Eugenius is also seen as, carrying the holy water, he hurries across the piazza, and once again in the group in the foreground where he pours the water over the clasped hands of the revived figure.

There is a wide difference of opinion as to the date of the Saint Zenobius series. Botticelli's work varied but little in its course, and the assignment of an exact date to his works, where there are no documents to aid, is uncertain and more difficult than in the cases of most of the masters, whose production shows distinct stages of development. Herbert Horne places these

works at the end of his career and even dates the Mond panels (which he regards as later than the Dresden picture) as late as 1505. I have not heard what date he fixes for our panel, but it could not be widely different from the time of the Mond pictures with which it shows such a similarity of workmanship and conception. Dr Richter, on the contrary, believes the three of the series about which he writes were painted between 1470 and 1480, that is, previous to the frescoes in the Sistine Chapel, which were done in 1481-1482. He gives as his reason for this date a similarity of types and stylistic peculiarities in the two series, making allowances for the difference in importance between the two commissions. In rebuttal of Mr. Horne's theory, he points out the obvious differences in technique and point of view between the Mond panels and the latest dated painting by Botticelli, the Nativity of the National Gallery, done in 1500.

Other dates have been suggested between these two extremes. On the point I hesitate to express an opinion, but I find very little in his work before the Sistine frescoes that would parallel the vehement movement and poignant passion of these Saint Zenobius paintings. To my mind the manner is more of his riper time, and I should be inclined to place them somewhere in the neighborhood of the Calumny of the Uffizi, which is generally considered to have been painted between 1490 and 1495. I find in our picture an echo of the tense and energetic line, of the clear, clean color, and above all, of the feverish intensity of that masterpiece.

But the question of date is chiefly of interest to special students and may be left to them for decision. The main concern is that our Museum has been able at this late day to secure for itself one of the rare examples of this important and very significant master; for, more than any other, Botticelli is the essence of the Early Renaissance, and his work is charged with all the anticipation and assurance and individualism of that time.

B. B.